SB 378 (Gonzalez) **Broadband Deployment Best Practices**

SUMMARY

SB 378 will help promote the deployment of broadband infrastructure and internet connectivity for all Californians by requiring local jurisdictions to allow fiber cables to be installed using cost-effective techniques including aerial installations, open trenching or boring, or micro-trenching, if specified criteria is met. Specifically, this bill will create a best practices standard for deploying broadband infrastructure that local planning agencies must follow when an entity seeks to deploy broadband in their community.

EXISTING LAW

Under existing law, the California Public Utilities Commission has jurisdiction over public utilities, including electrical corporations. Moreover, the existing Electric Tariff Rule 20 establishes policies for the undergrounding of electric facilities and includes among other programs, the Rule 20A undergrounding program, which requires electrical corporations to convert overhead facilities to underground facilities when doing so in the public's interest.

BACKGROUND/PROBLEM

Currently, every local jurisdiction in California has different fiber installation requirements. Certain local jurisdictions that are using best practices to allow for the installation of fiber are doing so in a couple of months, whereas other jurisdictions are taking several years to approve the same type of project. Local "Permitting Authorities" include cities, counties, state agencies and any other entity that may be required to issue a permit for a Broadband project such as, water districts, special districts, and municipal utilities.

The City of Long Beach recently allowed fiber to be deployed on existing aerial utility lines resulting in 16 miles of broadband being installed in 6 weeks. This type of project using best practices only cost hundreds of thousands of dollars and serves a significantly larger portion of people.

Additionally, the City of Los Angeles recently adopted a micro-trenching ordinance to accelerate the installation of fiber underground leading to over 40 miles of broadband deployment.

Areas not using these best practices can drive costs well into the millions of dollars, take multiple years to complete, and provide less people with broadband service as a result.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it clear that Californians need broadband connection as quickly as possible. Laying fiber is a critical component to support broadband connection and to bring advanced, fast and reliable internet services, whether to the home, community or somewhere in between. Further, the cost of laying fiber is still the most expensive part of bringing broadband to new places. By lowering installation costs and speeding up deployment of fiber hundreds of thousands of Californians will be able to access the internet to complete their school work, access telehealth services, work remotely, and much more.

SOLUTION

SB 378 requires that local permitting authorities allow fiber to be installed in the quickest, safest, and most cost-effective way. It also makes clear that local governments can charge fees for the expedited approval of broadband permits.

SB 378 sets Best Practices for Broadband Deployment Including:

• The installation of fiber using existing aerial utility lines along the fiber route. This technique is the quickest, safest and most cost effective way to build.

• If aerial utility lines are not available along the fiber route and undergrounding is necessary, then utilizing micro-trenching technology is the quickest, most-cost effective, and least disruptive way to install fiber underground in communities. Micro-trenching involves minimally digging a narrow trench often a few inches wide and a couple feet deep.

• If micro-trenching is not feasible along the fiber route, then traditional open-trenching which is often more expensive, disruptive, and takes longer, can be used.

SUPPORT

Crown Castle (Sponsor)

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